

the purpose of conserving device power. After the momentary display duration has expired, the display may turn 'OFF' along with the device. In some embodiments, if device power from a battery or other source is sufficient, the displayed information may be continuously displayed 140 until a valid lockout bypass is received 110 by the device.

Momentary display of owner information may also be coupled to or activated by a sensor including, but not limited to, a position, touch and/or motion sensor, such that the information is momentarily displayed whenever the device is perturbed (e.g., touched or moved). For example, the owner information may be displayed for approximately one to five minutes each time the sensor detects device movement. Displaying owner information whenever the device is perturbed has an advantage of providing the information without requiring that the device be turned 'ON' and also, providing some battery power conservation when the device is sitting motionless and undisturbed.

If lost and found service contact information is displayed 140, the method 100 further comprises providing 150 a lost and found service. The lost and found service can be a service organization that is either affiliated or unaffiliated with the device manufacturer, law enforcement, or an insurance company, for example. The service organization can receive payment for the service periodically from the consumer, as a part of an insurance premium or service agreement fee, for example, that the consumer has on the electronic device. Likewise, the lost and found service may be affiliated with the consumer's homeowners/rental insurance company, or the like, and the fee is paid each time the homeowners/rental insurance premium comes due. The owner provides a device description, model number, serial number, and owner contact information to the lost and found service organization, as appropriate, which is kept on file in case the electronic device is lost or stolen and subsequently returned to the service organization.

The owner information along with any other information that is displayed is loaded into memory of the electronic device using any one of several conventional interface methods. For example, a user interface of the device that provides various buttons and/or keys can be used to load the owner information into the device.

Preferably, the device provides a data input/output (I/O) interface, such as a Universal Serial Bus (USB). Such an I/O interface allows the owner information to be uploaded from a personal computer or another external source. One skilled in the art is familiar with such interfaces and their use in transferring data such as would be used to create the displayed information.

The lost and found service receives the disabled 130 electronic device from a party that finds the device, uses owner identification information to determine an address of the owner, and sends the device to the owner using the determined address. Such a lost and found service can use a serial number of the device in lieu of or in addition to the owner information stored in memory of the device. As mentioned hereinabove, the device does not have to have any actual owner identification information stored in memory since that information can be accessed by the lost and found service using the device serial number. As with owner contact information, the lost and found service information may be displayed 140 continuously or momentarily.

In another aspect of the invention, an electronic device 200 having a return-to-owner security lockout is provided. Figure 2 illustrates a block diagram of the electronic device 200. The electronic device 200 comprises a controller 210, a memory 220, a user interface 230, and a computer program 240 stored in memory 220. The controller 210 executes the computer program 240 and controls the operation of the user interface 240 and the memory 220. The computer program 240 when executed implements the return-to-owner security lockout of the present invention and displays owner information on a display of the user interface 230. Preferably, the return-to-owner security lockout embodied in the computer program 240 implements the method 100 of return-to-owner security lockout of the present invention.

In particular, the computer program 240 contains instructions that, when executed, activate lockout and disable operation of the device 200 unless a valid lockout bypass input is received by the device 200. As discussed above, the lockout bypass input depends on a type of security lockout employed and includes, but is not limited to, a password entered via the user interface 230 or a key inserted into the

device 200. While the device 200 is disabled, the computer program 240 displays the owner information. The owner information may contain one or more of the owner's name, the owner's address and/or telephone number, a name and address/telephone number of a lost and found service, as described above. When lockout is not active and the device 200 is not otherwise disabled, the owner information can be edited so that change of ownership and other information updates can be readily accommodated. The computer program 240 may be stored in memory 220 as either firmware or software.

Solely to facilitate further discussion, the electronic device 200 having return-to-owner security lockout is described below with reference to digital cameras. However, this description of the electronic device 200 as a digital camera is one preferred application and in no way is intended to limit the scope of the present invention. One of ordinary skill in the art can readily extend the discussion hereinbelow regarding the digital camera to any electronic device.

Figure 3 illustrates a block diagram of the electronic device 300 of the present invention in the form of a digital camera 300 that employs return-to-owner security lockout. Recall that the digital camera 300 is simply a representative example of any electronic device 200 having a user interface 230. The digital camera 300 comprises a controller 310, an imaging subsystem 320, a memory subsystem 330, an interface subsystem 340, a power subsystem 350, and a control program 360 stored in the memory subsystem 330. The controller 310 executes the control program 360 and controls the operation of the subsystems 320, 330, 340, 350 of the digital camera 300. The power subsystem 350 provides operational power to the camera.

The controller 310 can be any sort of component or group of components capable of providing control and coordination of the subsystems 320, 330, 340, and 350. For example, the controller 310 can be a microprocessor or microcontroller. Alternatively, the controller 310 can be implemented as an application specific integrated circuit (ASIC) or even an assemblage of discrete components. The controller 310 is interfaced to the imaging subsystem 320, the memory subsystem 330, the interface subsystem 340, and the power subsystem 350. In some